
Iowa Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Prison Farms

ISSUE

This *Issue Review* is a description of the Prison Farms Program, including location, size, types of activities, revenues and expenses.

AFFECTED AGENCIES

Department of Corrections

CODE AUTHORITY

Sections 904.302 and 904.706, Code of Iowa

BACKGROUND

Nationally on January 1, 1997, a total of 444,000 inmates were employed in prison jobs. Thirty five thousand of these inmates (7.8%) were employed in prison farm jobs. Of the 33 states employing inmates in prison farm jobs, Kansas had the fewest with 10 inmates, and Texas had the most with 21,000. Iowa employed 15 inmates in prison farm jobs.

On January 1, 1991, there were 36 states that employed inmates in prison farm jobs. Between 1991 and 1997, eight states had discontinued employment of inmates in prison farm jobs while five states had implemented prison farm employment. During this time, the number of inmates employed in prison farm jobs increased from 17,000 to 35,000 inmates, a 99.6% increase. (The Corrections Yearbook-1991 and The Corrections Yearbook-1997)

CURRENT SITUATION

The Iowa Department of Corrections is responsible for 12 farms. (See Attachment I.) Each prison, except for Fort Dodge and Mount Pleasant, has a farm. The farms range in size from 10 acres used for gardening at Oakdale to 1,436 acres at Anamosa. The Department of Corrections (DOC) retained responsibility for four farms owned by the Department of Human Services (DHS) after becoming a separate department in 1983.

The Prison Farms have a total of 6,919 acres. In the 1998 calendar year, 3,675 acres are planted to row crops, 3,052 acres are pasture, and 192 acres are being used for institutional

gardens. The Farms leased 3,274 of the crop and pasture land to seven different renters, and the remaining 3,453 acres of crop and pasture land is being farmed by prison staff and inmates.

There are approximately 10 inmates employed as farmhands year round at the Fort Madison and Anamosa farms. No inmates are employed at the DHS-owned farms. Another 90 inmates are employed seasonally to work in the gardens. Four DOC employees operate the Fort Madison and Anamosa farms. One contract employee is assigned to operate the DHS Eldora farm and another is assigned to the DHS Glenwood Farm. Gardening is an institutional activity, rather than a Prison Farm function. Supervision of inmate gardeners is provided by institutional staff. The remaining farm land is rented to area farmers, and no DOC employees or contract employees are assigned to those farms.

Only garden produce is used for inmate consumption. The row crops raised on prison farms are sold on the open market or used to feed livestock. At the beginning of calendar year 1998, Prison Farms had a herd of 25 cattle at Fort Madison, 223 head at Glenwood, and 261 head at Anamosa. Since then the herd has increased due to the birth of calves and decreased with sales. There were 451 hogs at Eldora. The hog operation has been discontinued, and the hogs have been sold. The standard practice is for cattle and hogs to be sold on the open market. They are not purchased by the institutions and used for inmate consumption.

ALTERNATIVES

The Prison Industries Annual Report (November 1997) identifies opportunities for employing inmates on the prison farms in mending fences, gardening, and repairing, demolishing, and constructing buildings. The Report states that labor intensive work by inmates is incompatible with today's farming techniques, that inmates cannot operate high technology farm equipment, and that the length of stay is insufficient to train an inmate to handle the equipment.

During the 1998 budget hearings with the Justice System Appropriations Subcommittee, it was recommended that the Department of Corrections identify and develop alternative farming methods or crop selections that would allow the Department to take advantage of the cheap and plentiful inmate labor supply rather than relying upon current, highly mechanized farming practices.

The Department is examining the feasibility of establishing a centralized processing operation for meat and vegetables to serve the entire prison system. The Department is considering butchering prison-raised cattle and expanding the gardening operation. The discussion at an August 6, 1998, meeting at Fort Madison of the prison farm staff suggested that a centralized processing operation for the whole prison system offers potential economies of scale and cost savings that could not be realized by processing operations at each prison. Department staff will be examining how other states have implemented food processing for their prison systems and determining whether such a system can be established in Iowa.

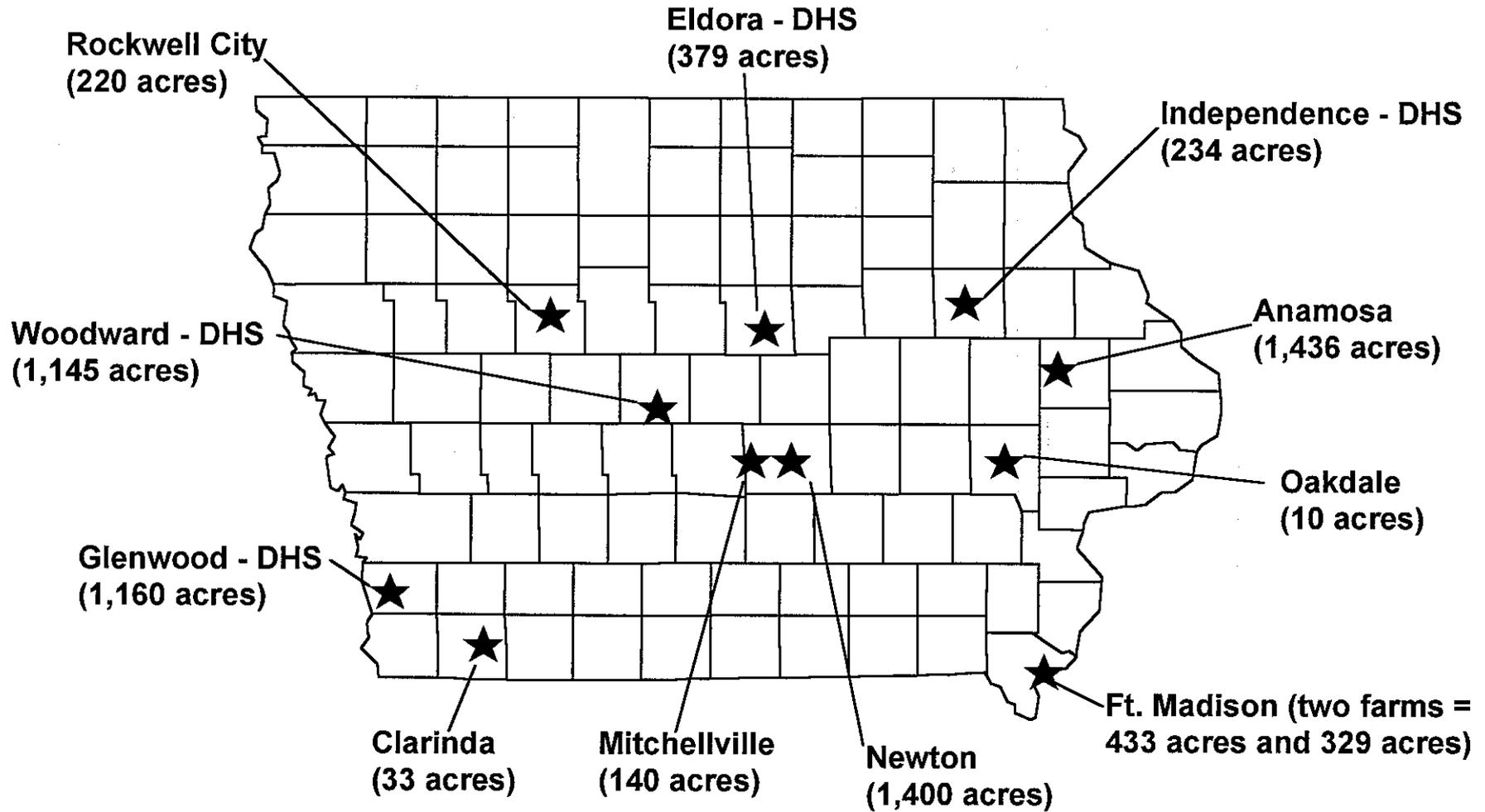
BUDGET IMPACT

Prison Farms and Prison Industries are self supporting entities and do not receive a General Fund appropriation for operations. Prison Farms has annual gross revenues of approximately \$850,000 and an owner's equity of approximately \$1.7 million. As for earnings, the Prison Farms lost \$3,000 in 1997, earned \$15,000 in 1996, and lost \$47,000 in 1995. (The Prison Farms operate on a calendar year instead of a State Fiscal Year budget.) The Department has indicated that it

generally loses money on operations run by Prison Farms and offsets the losses with profits from cash rent of farm land.

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Locations of Prison Farms



(6,919 acres total)